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191553Z Dec 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 009352

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HIGHLIGHTS OF PRESIDENT MUBARAK'S ADDRESS OPENING
PARLIAMENT

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11. (SBU) During an address on December 19, President Mubarak opened parliament with a 40-minute address that emphasized political and economic reform but did not contain any major new proposals or signal any changes of course. This is not unusual, as Mubarak rarely uses the annual parliamentary opening to launch new initiatives. The following is an overview of the speech:

Political Reform

12. (U) President Mubarak made political reform a centerpiece of his address:

-- He described the recent presidential and parliamentary elections as a step toward political reform.

-- He acknowledged that there were still challenges that needed to be studied and tackled so as not to obstruct "our march toward democracy."

13. (U) Mubarak emphasized his commitment to the principles outlined in his campaign, particularly:

-- Equality of citizens regardless of sex, religion, ideology, etc.;

-- respect for the freedoms and rights of citizens;

-- the supremacy of law and judicial authority;

-- strengthening the role of political parties and civil society organizations and empowering women;

-- combating unemployment and opening new markets; and

-- realizing a society that supports intellectuals, scientists and innovators.

The Parliament's Responsibility

14. (U) On the new parliament and its mission, President Mubarak stressed that both the majority and the opposition share a responsibility, beyond their normal legislative and oversight duties, to continue democratic reform. Mubarak also emphasized that the Egyptian people's desires must be taken into account in pursuing further constitutional reforms.

Legislative Agenda for the Coming Term

15. (U) On the legislative agenda for the coming term, Mubarak mentioned:

-- a bill that would strengthen the independence of the judiciary;

-- new legal articles governing the press and publications;

-- a review of laws concerning criminal procedures, including administrative detention;

-- a new law to establish commercial courts that would deal with corporate and consumer disputes;

-- a new law that would establish an educational quality control authority that would raise Egyptian education to international standards; and

-- new bills to complete the reform of tax laws/trade transactions, etc.

Foreign Policy

16. (U) On foreign policy Mubarak stressed his commitment to security and stability in the region; commitment to the MEPP; and determination to use Egypt's international prestige to attract more investment and tourism.

Economy

17. (U) Mubarak underscored his determination to increase employment (promising to create 4.5 million sustainable jobs over the coming six years); services (including 12 projects related to housing, transportation, health, education and infrastructure, access to clean water and sewage system networks, and developing squatter settlements); social security (reforming pensions and public wage systems); and a program for the middle class (to include access to finance for mortgages and education).

JONES